

belit sağ: Let Me Remember Opening

Jan. 19, 2018. On view through Apr. 14, 2018

Opening Reception	Jan. 19, 2018, 7–9pm
Members & VIP Reception	6pm
Public Reception	7–9pm
Conversation with belit sağ and Jasmina Tumbas	7:30pm
Exhibition on view through	Apr. 14, 2018

Free and open to the public

Squeaky Wheel Film & Media Art Center presents Let Me Remember, the first solo exhibition of artist and videoactivist belit sağ (Turkey/Netherlands) in North America. Comprised of five new video installations, Let Me Remember functions as an investigation into the state of being racialized in Europe, taking a series of brutal murders by the German National Socialist Underground (NSU) as its context. The NSU was a terror group that killed ten people and planted bombs in migrant neighborhoods between 2000–2008. German media reports at the time ignored the racial motivations of their violence.

belit sağ's work explores how media imagery can render the visibility (and invisibility) of personhood in a personal and essayistic form. The works in Let Me Remember bring together archival

footage of the NSU's victims, images of objects from the crime scenes, and transcripts of the trials made by local activist groups, to ask questions on how white supremacy and whiteness in a European context affect and change narratives. Squeaky Wheel is proud to present this emerging artist and bring to the public the acuity with which sağ questions and reconfigures the role of media. This exhibition is also a way for us to build an international framework to conversations about structural racism and injustice within the United States and beyond.

A public conversation between the artist and Jasmina Tumbas will take place at the opening on January 19. Two new essays on belit sağ's work by Almudena Escobar López and Chi-hui Yang are published here to accompany the exhibition.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

January 16, 7pm @ Anthology Film Archives (New York, NY)

I Do Not Remember is a screening as part of the Winter/Spring 2018 season of Flaherty NYC, featuring work by belit sağ and Colectivo los Ingrávidos. Programmed by Almudena Escobar López & Herb Shellenberger, presented by The Flaherty.

February 28, 7pm @ Squeaky Wheel Film & Media Art Center

A Few Short Films That Engage In Struggle is a screening inspired by belit sağ's work, featuring films by Basma Alsharif, Decolonize this Place, Rhys Hall, Adam & Zack Khalil, and Jackson Polys. Curated by Nitasha Dhillon (MTL Collective).

January 11 & 18 @ Buffalo Center for Art & Technology

belit sağ teaches a workshop series with participants from Buffalo Youth Media Institute, a free after school program led by Squeaky Wheel at the Buffalo Center for Art and Technology. The class, titled "The story behind the story" introduced students to tactics of recontextualizing media.

WE REMEMBER

BY ALMUDENA ESCOBAR LÓPEZ

Camera and event. Since its invention, film has seemed destined to make history visible. It has been able to portray the past and stage the present. We have seen Napoleon on horseback and Lenin on the train. Film was possible because there was history. Almost imperceptibly, like moving forward on a Moebius strip, the side was flipped. We look on and have to think: if film is possible, then history too is possible.

—Voiceover from *Videograms of a Revolution* (Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujică (1992)

When we tell a story, a little piece of ourselves travels with our words, to be shared with those who are listening. By telling, we reimagine and project ourselves into the narrative, creating a living archive in constant flux.

belit sağ's archival practice works in a similar way: it allows the stories to exist. This doesn't mean that what we hear are direct testimonies of the voiceless, or that the camera changes hands in a participatory documentary mode. Instead, fiction and personal reflection create a tangential line that cracks open the surface of the present. By disrupting the circulation of images and questioning their meaning, sağ reminds viewers that there are responsibilities involved in the act of looking and that our field of vision is determined by political parameters of visibility. As an alternative to visual passive consumption, sağ proposes a focused and receptive mode of watching that requires awareness and an alert attitude towards media. This "expanded viewing" is more than seeing, it is a personal meditative exercise that invites the viewer to defocus their knowledge, amplifying it to things that are overlooked, left on the side or simply ignored. By carefully describing what is actually in the images, speculating about their contextualization, or by explaining the field of vision of the attendees of a courtroom, sağ explores the margins of historical documentation.

In *cut-out* (2017/2018) the viewer is confronted with the composite image circulated in the press which included

2 the portraits of the ten victims of the National Socialist Underground (NSU) murders. These were a series of hate crimes perpetrated by the far-right terrorist organization between 2000–2007 throughout Germany. Since the murders started, the German government ignored the racist nature of the crimes, treating them as isolated attacks or as mafia related assaults. sağ shows the victims as they were presented in the press in a group of small portraits, and describes them, one by one, focusing on the material details of each image. What do we see when we look at the portrait of a murdered victim in the media? sağ wonders around the margins of these images, speculating about the personal relationships between the subject in the photograph and the image itself. Did the victim see this portrait? Where was the image taken? Is it a photograph? Is it a silhouette separated from a group photograph? Is it a passport image? The images that before were operating within certain pre established historical parameters, start to expand, proposing different functionalities.

In *aksama (disruption)* (2016) sağ composes a collage with found materials that gradually communicate with each other. The footage is both from popular films and from the Turkish news during the failed coup attempt in July 2016. The composite image is superimposed on first-person footage of sağ's feet while walking from point A to point B. Here all the images are operating independently from each other, while also exploring their mutual relationships by means of the subjective position of the filmmaker. Likewise, the intertwined relationship between the found images and sağ's pacing relate to the overwhelming feeling that the saturation of images in the media provokes. *aksama (disruption)* creates an open playground where knowledge is generated through the friction between facts and subjective fictional production.

sağ's "expanded viewing" invites audiences to develop close relationships with events in which they did not participate. The re-telling becomes a live activation of the archive, an invitation to perform in unison with the images cohabitating the space with sağ herself. sağ envisions an open concept of archive

where affective connections between subjects and objects are central. Her storytelling and the storytelling of others, becomes an act of resistance against the linearity of history, and its predetermined contextualization of images. For sağ archival images are durational points in time that can be rewinded and forwarded. This temporal flexibility explores the hierarchical structures of image production questioning the intake of images, their impact, and their later processing by the subject.

(Against) Randomness (2017) was made for the People's Tribunal against the NSU attacks. In this case, the purpose of the narrative is to create solidarity among the victims. Their discourse in the shape of textual quotes takes over in an attempt to disrupt the enclosed public image tailored by the state around the murders. Quotes appear and disappear on the screen over a background of enlarged details from digital images borrowed from personal and public archives related to the case. The words do not include the references, avoiding the hierarchy that they create. It doesn't matter where they are coming from, all the elements of the narrative are equally important and function as a network. Functioning on a similar connective level, *overexposed* (2017/2018) is an installation piece that combines transcriptions of the NSU trials made by local activist organizations, with images of the crime scenes from the press. Edited in between are schematic drawings of the courtroom where the trials took place, explaining how each of the parties were allocated and what their field of vision was. The personal narrative of the victims in this case is spatially situated in the courtroom. The viewer did not participate in the trials but now is able to glimpse over the spatial interrelations of the stories that are heard. *overexposed* is a temporal collapse between the images of the murders, the courtroom, the transcription, sağ's voice reading the transcriptions, and the viewer. Suddenly the images that before were functioning within certain preconditions of knowledge, start to transform themselves into spaces of reflection and mirroring. Memory displays itself as a modular space of interconnections, and storytelling becomes a closer look at facts.

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This treatment of the archive as an open space—shareable and autonomous—differs from the enclosed static idea of the public archive as a repository of knowledge. Here the archive is both lived and conceptual. sağ's independently open archive is based on contextualization, interpersonal relationships, and the redistribution of information. Her “expanded viewing” is more than simply reorganizing the archive through reappropriation, it is about cultivating a critical approach to knowledge that recognizes the importance of the emergent and the residual. *W*

BELIT SAĞ: EXCESSIVE IDEAS

BY CHI-HUI YANG

In belit sağ's video practice, the photographic image is an excessive object—an object whose meaning is shaped by forces beyond its frame, wields and condenses social power, and controls bodies and behaviors. The image is also one which demands. It structures seeing as a political act and insists on response, analysis, and accountability. It is capable of violence, of telling truth, half-truth and falsity, and of reproducing itself. It possesses radical possibility.

sağ is a collector and deconstructor of images. Central to her practice is an inquiry into how state power and violence flow through the image; how production, circulation and interpretation of photographs and video reveal optical regimes, shaping the visible or invisible, the accountable or forgotten. sağ builds her videos from images which mold and reinforce social behaviors and narratives: newspaper archives, social media, cinema, propaganda tapes, surveillance video, television news. Through gesture, collage, abstraction, and most importantly, text, her works examine how ideology is embedded in representations of reality, and the spells these forces are capable of casting.

sağ is concerned with the nation, race and ideology—social formations which are often called upon to justify violence. An artist from Turkey based in Amsterdam, the subjects of her first-person video essays are the charged dynamics created by the relationship between Turkey's borders and national identity: Ayhan Çarkın, a paramilitary

policeman understood to have killed hundreds of Kurds on behalf of the Turkish state; memories of conflict on the Turkish-Syrian border; and in her most recent work, the murder of Turkish and Kurdish individuals by a German Neo-Nazi group. The titles of her videos reflect that her inquiry is not just about politics, but the complicity of the image within: *my camera seems to recognize people* (2016), *and the image gazes back* (2014), *overexposed* (2017), *cut-out* (2017), *grain* (2016). Her videos are staged as encounters with images whose real and symbolic power require interrogation, self-reflexive conversations between her and fragments of video or grainy photos about the creative and political act of filmmaking itself, and the role and precarity of the artist in conducting it.

In *Ayhan and Me* (2016), sağ examines notions of artistic production, censorship, and control through her relationship as an artist with the images of Ayhan Çarkın. A video about its own making and a critique of social and artistic institutions, it charts the trajectory of the video from being one about Çarkın, to one about the symbol of Çarkın, and its power to censor. In 2015, sağ was asked to create work for an exhibition supported by the Istanbul arts center Akbank Sanat. When the gallery learned that the piece would concern Çarkın, it bowed to political pressure and censored the project. In the fourteen-minute piece, she crumbles, bends, over exposes and obscures a photograph of Çarkın, exercising her own power over it even while the photograph determines the parameters of her video. She muses “questioning who manipulates who, is a part of [her] practice, even perhaps has become its backbone in this climate of war.”

In an earlier work, *and the image gazes back* (2014) she examines the relationship between the political act and mass-circulating media images, real and fictive, by asking what informs and distinguishes one's actions from the representations of them. Weaving together references to ISIS, Twitter, *Dog Day Afternoon*, photographs from the occupation of television stations during the Romanian Revolution, and the television broadcast of the 1982 Spanish Parliament Coup, she asks whether there is a distinction be-

tween images capturing us and us being captured by images, pointing to “images that reimagine the real and on the other hand, realities that look like they are faking fiction.”

In her most recent videos, (*Against Randomness*, *overexposed* and *cut-out* (all 2017)), sağ examines the National Socialist Underground (NSU) murders, where between the years 2000–2007, Turks and Kurds were targeted and killed in Germany by this Neo-Nazi group. The three together form an inquiry into the construction of history, memory, and the optics of justice. (*Against Randomness* calls for the necessity of narrativization—the linking of related histories together to reveal patterns of violence and abuse of power. In this text-driven video, amidst fragmented images of everyday life, she muses on remembrance, forgetfulness, and what allows traces of lives made invisible to be seen. In the video she writes, “storytelling is resistance against the perception that life is a series of random events.”

This idea of forging connective tissue as resistance animates *cut-out*, an examination of the media photos of individuals murdered by the NSU. Moving through each individual's newspaper image, she asks what they tell us—what the lighting, background, quality and cropping reveal about the individuals. Intimate portraits of the victims' lives are offered through holiday photos, studio portraits, and passport images. What do the excesses of these images say? What isn't included in the images that we can draw out, what does a background color or a gesture reveal, and how are these separate lives linked? While sağ intentionally omits images of violence, its spectre is conjured in the mind of the viewer, through the act of sewing together the connections between the disparate yet intimate lives on display. What cannot be seen but only imagined often exceeds reality and can operate as a powerful political tool and creative device.

The architectural and cultural biases built into the criminal trials of the NSU murders are explored in *overexposed*. sağ uses a schematic of the Munich courtroom where the trials were held, choosing to dissect the tightly controlled lines of sight between those occupying the room. The denied visual connections be-

ABOUT THE ARTISTS AND CONTRIBUTORS

belit sağ is a videomaker and visual artist living in Amsterdam. She studied mathematics in Ankara; audio-visual arts in Amsterdam. Her video background is rooted in video-activist groups in Ankara and Istanbul, where she co-initiated projects like karahaber.org (2000–2007) and bak.ma (a growing online audiovisual archive of social movements in Turkey). Her recent video work focuses on “the violence of representation” and “representation of violence”. She completed residencies in Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam in 2014–2015; and International Studio and Curatorial Program, New York in 2016. She has presented her work at museums, galleries, and film festivals worldwide, including Toronto/Rotterdam/San Francisco/New York International Film Festival/International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA); EYE Filmmuseum, Amsterdam; documenta14; Kassel; MOCA, Taipei; Tütün Deposu, Istanbul; Tabakalera Film Seminar, San Sebastian; Marabouparken, Stockholm.

Almudena Escobar López is an archivist, film curator, and scholar from Spain. She is a Ph.D. student in the Graduate Program in Visual and Cultural Studies at the University of Rochester where she also holds a Public Humanities Fellowship. Her dissertation explores the notion of collaborative aesthetics in relation to ideas of artistic cooperativism, paying particular attention to the filmmaker's cooperatives founded in the 1960s in New York, San Francisco, and London. She combines her academic research and writing with her practice as a film archivist and curator having worked at institutions such as Lux Artists' moving image, The Academy Film Archive, the Archives of American Art and

SPONSORS

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Rastlantısallık (*Against Randomness*), 2017, Netherlands/Turkey
HD Video with sound, 2min20sec.

kesik (*cut-out*), 2017/2018, Netherlands/Turkey
HD video with sound, 3min40sec.

Bakılmış, Silinmiş... (*The gazed and the erased...*), 2018, Netherlands/Turkey
HD video with sound, 50sec.

Window Gallery
Yanağımın yarısı (*Half of my cheek*), 2018, Netherlands/Turkey
HD videos, vinyl print, sound

Festival. Yang is also an instructor at Brooklyn's UnionDocs and has served as an adjunct professor at the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism and Hunter College. He earned a master's degree in film studies from San Francisco State University and a bachelor's degree in political science from Stanford University.

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

All works by belit sağ. Sound design for all works by Sergio González Cuervo.

aşırı pozlanmış (*overexposed*), 2017/2018, Netherlands/Turkey
HD video with sound, 4min20sec.

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